DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 473 HE 014 479

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TITLE Submission, Rejection, Frustration: Perhaps There Isn't A Better Way.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Authors; Criteria; *Editing; *Guidelines; Higher Education; *Information Dissemination; *Marketing; *Newsletters; Periodicals; Researchers; Research Needs; *Scholarly Journals; Specifications; Standards
IDENTIFIERS *Faculty Publishing

ABSTRACT

The opinions of 51 journal editors concerning the concept of a manuscript marketing newsletter for academicians were surveyed. The proposed monthly or quarterly newsletter would inform authors and researchers of editorial needs and requirements for publications. Editors of highly regarded journals in education, psychology, and sociology were surveyed since at times the subject matter of each area will overlap and be of interest to various behavioral scientists. Based on responses from 33 journal editors, it was found that in general the editors were not very optimistic about the potential benefits that could be derived from a manuscript marketing newsletter. Education editors were more willing to participate than were editors in sociology and psychology. A majority of the editors who expressed a willingness to contribute to the newsletter returned a copy of their editorial guidelines. This action appears to indicate that the editors believe a potential contributor should consult recent issues of a particular periodical for a firm understanding of the journal's format and intended audience. Some respondents felt that authors who do not examine journal issues to determine their scope/audience would not likely consult the proposed newsletter. In addition, many editors opposed the idea of offering editorial direction. Editors opposed to the idea mentioned matter such as: lack of subscribers, correspondence required to obtain timely information, and information sources that might serve the same functions. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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ED207473

Submission, Rejection, Frustration: Perhaps There Isn't A Better Way.

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HE 014 479

Abstract

Acamedicians do a poor job when it comes to marketing their manuscripts. Too often, they fail to consider the audience they are writing for; or the editorial thrust of a particular journal.

The opinions of fifty-one journal editors were solicited to determine their receptivity to the concept of a manuscript marketing newsletter to help remedy this situation.

Submission, Rejection, Frustration:

Perhaps There Isn't A Better Way.

The academic publishing world is astir. Journal editors are overwhelmed with inappropriate submissions (McCarthy, 1973), simultaneous submissions (Barclay, 1980; McCarthy, 1974), rising production costs (Mullins, 1977; Scully, 1975), and manuscripts that are intellectual remnants rather than publishable pieces (Lewis, 1977).

Authors are dejected because of high rejection rates (Maher, 1978; Rodriques and Uhlenberg, 1978), review spans of from 12 to 18 months (Hamilton, 1978), and the development of theme issues which prevent quality manuscripts from being accepted because they fail to address a specific concept or topic (Rodriques and Uhlenberg, 1978).

Some authors have developed solutions to these problems. Webb (1979) for instance has suggested the establishment of a central data bank. The purpose would be to trace the submission records of all manuscripts in a specific subject area. After the alloted number of submissions have expired for a particular article, one of two alternatives could be imposed: 1) the manuscript would not be elgible for submission in the future, or 2) the author would lose manuscript submission privileges for a certain length of time.

Hamilton (1978) favors the use of literary agents by acamedicians. Analogous to the role literary agents play for popular authors, the academic literary agent would be concerned with submissions and publications; while the author is at work on more productive pursuits such as research and writing.

Nothing is more frustrating to an author than to pursue a topic, write up the results, and then be told by an editor that the topic is of little interest to anyone. Dorn (1980) has encouraged authors to write query letters to editors as a solution to this blind alley approach. Written in outline form, the query letter is nothing more than a description of the author's intended project, which allows the editor to respond with comments and suggestions prior to the author's involvement with the proposed project.

Still, others have gone as far as to publish marketing guides for various disciplines (Camp, 1968; Markle and Rinn, 1976; and Sussman, 1979). The intended purpose of these being to give authors a compendium of available publishing outlets in their field, while at the same time offering information such as each periodical's editorial address, manuscript requirements, and reading audience.

Ingenious in their own right, each one of these methods holds merit and yet the drawbacks to each are just as great. The recording of all submissions in a central data bank would be tedious, time consuming and expensive. There seems to be little structure or monetary incentive for the would be literary agent. Writing query letters is an art and sometimes an impatient author will just as soon mail off an entire manuscript as sit down and write the kind of letter that is needed to whet an editor's appetite. Finally, the production costs of marketing guides are high and the information is often outdated within a year or two of production.

The editors of many general audience periodicals have a great deal in common with academic journal editors. They often face inappropriate and simultaneous submissions. Poorly written manuscripts are a fact of everyday

life and more than once an editor has been the brunt of an angry and frustrated author. In order to alleviate the flood of material that precipitates some of this ill feeling, many of these editors freely suggest to various magazines and newsletters what their topic needs are, a profile of their intended audience, and manuscript requirements and length. Two such magazines that publish these monthly reports are The Writer and Writer's Digest.

The purpose of these two periodicals is to assist potential contributors in becoming more aware of the various editorial needs of different markets and cutting down on the number of inappropriate submissions. A concern that is shared by academic editors as well as the editors of general audience periodicals.

This commonality lead me to conclude that perhaps academic editors and authors would benefit as well from such a publication. That is, a monthly or quarterly newsletter written for authors and researchers, which contains editorial needs and requirements. The purpose of this article is to report on the reactions of a number of journal editors to the concept of a proposed manuscript marketing newsletter for acamedicians.

Method

The names and/or addresses of the editors of 51 nationally refereed journals in education, psychology, and sociology were obtained from current issues of each. The fields of education, psychology, and sociology were selected since from time to time the subject matter of each will overlap and be of interest to various behavioral scientists. In addition, counselors are often in contact with the theoretical and research findings of these

three fields, which makes ERIC/CAPS an appropriate outlet for the results of this study.

An introductory letter outlining the proposed project and an example of what a possible contribution to the newsletter would look like were sent to each editor. In addition, each editor was sent a list of the other editors that would be contacted during the project. The purpose of this was to make each editor cognizant to the seriousness of the intended project and to insure a higher response rate since each editor would see that other reputable editors were being contacted.

Twenty-three (45%) journal editors responded to the initial mailing. Twenty-eight follow-up letters were mailed four months later. Each follow-up contained a copy of the original letter and a list of the other editors who had been contacted. Eleven of these editors responded to the follow-up letter. Thus, the total number of responses obtained were 34 (66%).

Results

Responses to the survey were initially divided into the three categories considered: education, psychology, and sociology. These results are displayed in Table I and they indicate that sociology editors were most responsive to the survey, with education editors being second in number, and the least number of responses coming from editors of psychology journals

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Insert Table I Here

Receptivity to the newsletter concept by editors was mixed. Results are displayed in Table II and indicate that overall there were more editors

against (44%) the manuscript marketing newsletter than were for it (33%) with a fair number (23%) having ambivalent feelings towards the idea.

Insert Table II Here

In terms of each discipline education editors (53%) were most in favor of the idea, while sociology (55%) and psychology (60%) editors felt it would not aid in solving the existing problems of scholarly publishing. It should be pointed out, however, that in general the basis for pro and con reactions for why the newsletter would be useful or not helpful to the publication process did not differ across disciplines. The following comments were gleaned from the responses received and they summarize quite aptly the various views editors hold toward the newsletter concept and the publishing process.

Pro

"Your idea is an excellent one, and we wish to encourage you in this endeavor. I am enclosing a copy of our guidelines (Sociology)."

"Most definitely, we would be interested in your proposed newsletter. Your idea is one I think most editors will applaud (Education)."

"I believe your idea may prove helpful. You may use the enclosed material (Psychology)."

Con

"Covering three different fields would not be attractive to people in a specialized area, and there would always be some time lag between receiving information and publication (Psychology)."

"I think the problems you identify . . . go deeper than might be perceived and which probably require surgery rather than a band-aid (Sociology)."

"If authors would merely look at the masthead statement on journals and occasionally look at the editorial policy, that by itself would be the single largest improvement (Psychology)."

"It seems unlikely that you would reach more than 1% of any particular periodicals subscribers or even potential contributors (Psychology)."

"We prefer not to regulate unsolicited manuscripts; we do not want to stifle creativity. Our biggest gripe is poor writing (Education)."

"I have mixed feelings . . . it may merely increase the flow of contributions (Education)."

Conclusions

In general, journal editors were not very optimistic about the potential benefits that could be derived from a manuscript marketing newsletter. It should be pointed out though that education editors were more willing to participate than were editors in sociology and psychology. Also, it should be noted that a majority of the editors who did express a willingness to contribute to the newsletter returned a copy of their editorial guidelines along with the survey. This is clearly an indication that most editors feel confident in suggesting that a potential contributor consult recent issues of a particular periodical for a firm understanding of the journal's format and intended audience; and it was for this reason above all others which caused many editors to view the marketing newsletter with a skeptic eye. As one editor put it, "I question whether an author who fails to examine even a single issue of a journal would even consult your newsletter."

In addition, many editors balked at offering editorial direction. One editor said, "I would hesitate to identify areas not well represented."

Another editor supported this comment by saying, "I would be concerned that this process (marketing newsletter) might also tend to affect the breadth of coverage within a given field, or a given subspeciality within that field. In other words, what comes in to an editor from the field is probably reflective of the current frontiers of a profession or a discipline . . . "

Many editors opposed to the newsletter expressed some concern over logistical matters such as: lack of subscribers, the enormous amount of correspondence required to obtain timely information, and delays in production which may be caused by editors who might be late with suggestions, etc. Others referred to sources which might serve the same function such as the Guide to Periodicals in Education by William Camp, Directory of Publishing Opportunities in Journals and Periodicals by Marques Media, and Author's Guide to Journals in Sociology and Related Fields by Marvin Sussman.

Therefore, potential contributions might do well in considering the timeless suggestions that have been offered by those already familiar with the publication process. Manuscripts which are clean, error free and grammatically correct, that have received a preliminary critique from fellow colleagues, and are written with the periodicals guidelines in mind, stand a far better chance of being accepted for publication than do papers which are carelessly written and submitted for publication with a half-hearted hope that some reviewer will discover the manuscripts hidden merits.

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TABLE I

Response Rate to Survey
According to Academic Discipline

	EDUCATION	SOCIOLOGY	PSYCHOLOGY	TOTAL
Contacted	22	11	18	51
Responded	15	9	10	34
Percent	68%	81%	55%	66%

TABLE II

Receptivity to Newsletter According
to Academic Discipline

	EDUCATION	SOCIOLOGY	PSYCHOLOGY	TOTAL
Pro	8	2	1	11
Con	4	5	6	15
Mixed	3	2	3	8
Total	15	9	10	34